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THE

**S P E E C H**

OF

**MICHAEL THOMAS SADLER,**

**M. P. FOR NEWARK,**

IN THE

**HOUSE OF COMMONS, ON THURSDAY THE THIRD OF JUNE,**

**ON PROPOSING**

**POOR LAWS FOR IRELAND,**

**PREPARATORY TO A**

**GENERAL MEASURE IN BEHALF OF THE LABOURING  
CLASSES OF ENGLAND.**



**LONDON:**

**JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.**

**MDCCCXXX.**

*Price One Shilling and Sixpence.*

THE  
SPEECH

MICHAEL THOMAS SADLER

OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

ON THE 12TH JANUARY 1848

LONDON:

PRINTED BY MILLS, JOWETT, AND MILLS,  
BOLT-COURT, FLEET-STREET.

GENERAL MEASURE IN BEHALF OF THE LABOURING  
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## SPEECH, &c.

IN rising to address the House on a subject which I have at length obtained an opportunity of bringing under its consideration, I feel how little probable it is that I should be able to do justice to its vast and acknowledged importance: involving, as it does, the highest principles, the best feelings, and the most sacred rights of humanity; a subject, Sir, not of a mere theoretical and abstract nature, but one necessarily practical and operative; nor affecting a particular order or small part of the community only, but bearing first on a numerous though unfortunate class of our fellow-beings, and through them upon the rest, however affluent and elevated; and, moreover, one upon which opinions the most varied, and indeed opposite, are confidently maintained, yet each dictating a policy as essentially different.—Then, Sir, the circumstance of Parliament having so often entertained questions of the nature I shall now submit to its attention, and to so little purpose; and having passed so many laws with the view of bettering the condition of the poor, many of which, it is now confessed on all hands, have been little reconcilable, in their operation, with their professed object, will render the House, I fear, little disposed to attend to suggestions of a similar nature; while the fact that Committees are still sitting, I believe, on matters professedly bearing on the question to which I am about to address myself, may render my present course apparently the less



necessary to be pursued. Sir, in approaching this subject, I feel forcibly these great discouragements ; but I shall not desist, being still more deeply impressed with the duty I have ventured to undertake, that of attempting a general measure, the object of which will be to improve the condition of the labouring poor. To this ultimate and main design, the resolution which I shall have the honour of submitting to the House on this occasion, important as I conceive it to be in itself, is but a preparatory step ; it is one, however, which I think is essential to the success of the whole. But to bespeak, as far as I can, the favourable consideration of the House, I will venture to state that neither the proposition which I shall have to submit this evening, nor the measure of which I wish it to be the precursor, is the consequence of recent convictions, or new lights upon the subject ; or the effect of some sudden and momentary impulse ; much less are they suggested by personal views and feelings : on the contrary, whether worthy of attention or otherwise, they are the result of deep consideration, fortified by all the facts I have been able to accumulate, and by that experience which has been gained by personally engaging in the duties which the system I wish to improve and extend imposes. The subject has long occupied my best attention, and is one to which I have rendered my recent pursuits subservient : however much, therefore, I may fail in my attempt, I shall not incur the odium of having obtruded upon the House what I have not fully considered, and do not believe to be eminently beneficial and entirely practicable. Upon the general measure, however, which I hope to submit to this House, I will not now enter, though fully prepared and anxious so to do when the opportunity shall arrive, being thoroughly convinced that no proposition in behalf of the industrious classes of society, especially in England, can be of the least avail till a legal provision for the poor of Ireland be first determined upon, and carried into effect. Till then we may appoint Committees annually—may enlarge the scope of their inquiries—



render their sittings perpetual—we may listen to and put into operation as many projects as we please ; or, to exonerate from their duty private individuals, dip as deeply as we have done into the public purse ; but till this measure be adopted, which justice, mercy, and policy itself equally demand, namely, the establishment of a Poor's Law for Ireland, all these attempts will be in vain ; the unrelieved poverty will not merely afflict the country in which it is thus deserted, but it will reach this. The condition of the English peasant and artisan, already so much deteriorated, will be still further debased, till at length they will be reduced to the miserable state of those of Ireland ; and this once industrious, independent, and prosperous community will be degraded into a populace of paupers. Then, Sir, I fear it will be somewhat too late to deal with a question which ought to have been settled centuries ago, and which, if you mean to deal with it at all, admits of little further delay. The interests of the industrious poor of both islands demand that a legal provision should be enacted in behalf of the poor of Ireland, and this is the proposition which I intend submitting to the House on the present occasion, preliminary to a general measure in favour of the labouring classes of the United Kingdom.

The first argument, then, which I shall advance in behalf of this proposition, is founded on the absolute necessity of such a provision, as regards the labouring classes of England. Much has been said of late concerning the necessity of assimilating as closely as possible the institutions of the two Islands ; the necessity of so doing, in this respect, is abundantly apparent. The Union has not only identified the legislatures of the two countries, but has given far greater facilities to their mutual intercourse ; and still more closely even than that great measure have the invention and extensive adoption of steam navigation united them, and placed them, indeed, in point of practical effect, in closer contact than, for instance, are the great and populous northern counties, with this the metropolitan one—rendering the international com-

munication, as respects the mass of the community, more easy, cheap, and rapid. The effects are abundantly plain, and in the present state of things irremediable. The institution of the Poor's Law of England encourages the demand for and increases the value of labour, as well as abates distress; in Ireland, in consequence of the want of such a law, labour is discouraged and distress increased. The inevitable result is—the constant influx of numbers from the latter country, which nothing but a better and uniform system will ever prevent.

Other circumstances also conspire to make this defect a still greater evil. If we consider the necessary consequences of Irish absenteeism, and the great extent to which it is unhappily carried; the want of labour, exorbitant rents, and the ruinous and oppressive system of underletting, to which it gives rise; if to these evils are added the clearing of farms, and driving forth the inhabitants at the pleasure of those who are thus invested virtually, though not ostensibly, with the power of life and death, and who are the means too frequently of occasioning the latter; if we also recollect that steam navigation has, by facilitating the cheap and speedy export of cattle, been another cause of that increase in the size of farms and comparative diminution in the tillage of the country, which has dispossessed so many little farmers and their labourers of their employment and their homes; I say, if we take into consideration these and other distressing facts, we are no longer at a loss to account for that mass of misery which is in constant existence, and which it is difficult to overrate or describe. Numerous little cultivators, who, notwithstanding the parsimony of living to which they submit, are barely enabled to sustain life, are deprived of their last shilling, and sent forth at once without the slightest provision, upon a country which yields them no employment, and affords them no relief. Whither can they direct their course? Many who can proceed so far, find “a distant home beyond the western main”—more still repair to this country, where they overstock the market of labour,

and occasion in no inconsiderable degree that distress under which our industrious population now suffers. Such, then, are the undeniable consequences of the want of a provision for the poor of Ireland similar to that of this country. The case would be precisely the same in England, were the poor in one half of it adequately provided for, and were they in the other left totally destitute. The indigent in the latter part would most certainly take refuge in the former, even though not entitled to direct relief, but to share in the general advantages which must ever result from such a system. The Irish do so, and in increasing multitudes—nor do I blame them. I condemn those who refuse them in their own country that relief in their distresses which justice and humanity equally dictate, and which is rendered in every other civilized nation upon earth. Thus is it that the want of a legal provision for the poor of Ireland operates as a grievous injury on those of England. The proprietors in the former island, being under no obligation to sustain the unemployed, the destitute, and distressed, have an interested and selfish motive, which may indeed be denominated a premium, for thus getting rid of them and driving them forth to utter destitution, when many of them necessarily take refuge here. They come for employment and for bread. The market of labour here is consequently overstocked, and its value greatly depressed by the unnatural rivalry of those numbers who are annually obliged to make this country their asylum. Thus is it that in the field and in the factory, at the forge or at the loom—in every sphere of industry, the Englishman finds himself interfered with, his wages greatly reduced, and himself in many cases thrown out of employment. The poor creatures who take refuge here, I repeat, I do not blame; absenteeism has deprived them of the means of subsistence, and, in effect, expelled them from the country. I would therefore receive and relieve them till a better system is established. In the mean time, however, I cannot refrain from reprobating in the strongest terms the conduct of those who cause these constant deportations. The interests of our own



poor imperiously demand that those of Ireland should be sustained; nor are their interests alone concerned; so great and general have the evils which I have referred to become, that it will, I think, be found ere long, that the rights of property, as well as those of poverty, will require the same remedy; then indeed may the poor of Ireland confidently hope for redress.

I come, therefore, to the proposition which I shall this evening submit to the House, as introductory to others of a more general character which I hope to have the honour of proposing to it on a further occasion, namely, that there should be established in Ireland a legal provision for the destitute poor. In attempting to recommend to the attention of Parliament this proposition, it will be unnecessary to found my future argument on the claims that the industrious classes of this country have that such a measure should be adopted; as it is in its nature one which, as applied to any country whatsoever, is recommended, and even demanded, by the plainest principles of justice, and by the soundest views of policy; and one which the peculiar condition of Ireland renders still more imperatively necessary.

Sir, I approach the argument in favour of a Poor's Law for Ireland, important and necessary as it unquestionably is, with the greater confidence of success, from having observed that the ground of all the several propositions which have been lately submitted to this House, and some of them adopted, has been simply that of justice, —alterations of the most momentous nature, with some of which I had the misfortune not to concur; others of a like kind which are still, it appears, contemplated: changes affecting, I may say revolutionizing, many institutions which had long been held sacred, have been all supported by the simple argument of justice. No matter how ancient was the principle to be attacked; no matter how deeply rooted the prejudices which were to be encountered; no matter how nearly individual interests might appear to be touched;



all these, it was, and still is agreed, ought certainly to give way to the principle of human rights—to the undoubted claims of justice. I hail these appeals, however I may differ sometimes as to their application ; I hail them more especially as regards my present motion, which is one, the justice of which is perhaps more apparent and demonstrable, however considered, than any abstract legislative proposition ever entertained. And if to justice be added another plea hardly less sacred, certainly not less touching, that of mercy, I cannot but think that it must be successful : that it will prevail on this occasion, I cherish the strongest hopes ; but that it will be finally triumphant I am fully certain. A measure which is equally dictated by the principles of reason, and the feelings of humanity ; by the institutions of civilization, and the rights and interests of society at large ; which has been sanctioned by the highest authorities that have ever existed, and adopted by every civilized country upon earth cannot be withheld from that one island which, though forming an integral part of the richest empire in the world, stands forth as one of the most striking examples of misery which Europe presents ; and in which, therefore, a national system of charity is the most essentially necessary. Before touching, however, upon this right of poverty, it may be proper to define what is meant by it. It is not put forth on behalf of the poor, as a right to a division of any part of the real property of the country ; on the contrary, it is one urged in perfect consistency with all the just claims of property, however rigidly maintained, and by whomsoever expounded ; it simply implies, a real and indisputable right that, after the institutions of the country have sanctioned the monopoly of property, the poor shall have some reserved claims to the necessaries of life ; and that these claims shall be available in the case of those only who may be smitten with sickness, and consequently incapable of labour ; disabled by age or incurable disease, and who can therefore labour no more ; of that infancy which, left parentless and destitute, makes so touching a demand upon our care ; of that state of wretch-

edness, so common in Ireland owing to causes to which I have already alluded, when those who are most willing and even anxious to work can nevertheless obtain no employment : that these should be relieved in some humble degree, so confined if you please, and limited, that the right thus recognised shall make little even apparent inroad on the amount of that wealth which shall be called upon to administer to these necessities ; but on the contrary, when duly understood, should actually increase its advantages. Finally, that all assistance should be administered in the form of remunerated labour, wherever the applicants are capable of it, to those who are willing and anxious to earn their humble pittance by the sweat of their brow. Such, then, are the narrow limitations of the right we assert in behalf of human indigence ;—the bare right, of existence.

But, Sir, it forms a distressing feature in some of the systems now promulgated, that this right, which for a succession of centuries has never been denied, now begins to be disputed. It lies at the foundation however of my proposition, and as such I shall attempt to uphold it ; not indeed by any abstract arguments of my own, but by the unanimous reasonings and declarations of the highest authorities that ever existed in the world, which I shall give in their own language. In doing this I shall not allude to the institutions of the legislators of the free states of antiquity, those of Greece and Rome, all of which it is well known recognised the right of their citizens to legal relief, and in a way so highly eulogized by many of their philosophers ; nor shall I draw an argument at present from the still more liberal and far more imperative and direct institutions of Moses. I shall not appeal to the authority of the primitive church before it was legally established, nor to its laws when it became dominant, in favour of this right ; it may suffice to state that it was acknowledged and enforced by all these, and by every argument, drawn from whatever source, human or divine. I will rather prove my position by the reasonings of those who have studied, in later times, the



rights of mankind, and to whose exposition of them the world continues to appeal; only selecting, however, a very few of these, but those few of such an order as that numbers could add nothing to the weight and importance of their authority.

First, Sir, I shall quote the celebrated Grotius, who has expressed himself as to this natural right in his great work, most explicitly. "Let us see," says he, "whether men may not have a right to enjoy, in common, those things that are already become the property of other persons." This is putting the query in a strong point of view indeed; hence he adds that "the question will at first seem strange, since property seems to have swallowed up that right which one man may lay claim to in common with the rest." "But this," he says, "is a mistake; for we must examine into the designs and intentions of those who first introduced those particular properties, which we may imagine to be such as deviated the least from natural justice. For if even written laws are always to be explained in that sense which comes nearest to common equity, much more are customs which are unconfined, and not at all chained down to the letter of the law. Whence it follows that in cases of absolute necessity, that former RIGHT of using things as if they still remained in common, must revive and be in full force." He says, moreover, that "such a RIGHT is for the preservation of natural equity, against the rigour and severity of property and dominion." He adds, indeed, that some precautions are to be regarded, "lest this liberty should go too far," and points out the very provisions which our own Poor Laws prescribe. This profound authority goes on to say that "this is a received opinion amongst all divines," and remarks that in the original form of government there are these exceptions and provisions. And he finally adds, what I am sure none will controvert, "If they who were first concerned in that division of things we now see, could be asked concerning this matter, they would answer the same as we assert." Puffendorf gives a somewhat different view of the subject, but

expresses himself in still stronger terms, and more at large upon it. Montesquieu also pronounces unhesitatingly in favour of this right in his great work, where he says, "The state owes to every citizen a certain subsistence." And whenever it happens that among the numerous persons engaged in different branches of trade some suffer, and he remarks upon the impossibility of a contrary supposition, he further declares, "that then the state ought to afford instant relief." I might quote many other writers, and indeed all the foreign jurists, to the like purpose; but I shall waive any further appeal to them in favour of our own unrivalled authorities. And to whom shall we first refer on this important point? Who is it that, occupying the very foremost rank to this hour amongst the profoundest reasoners, and the most unsullied patriots of this or any other nation, is the best entitled to be heard? The understanding of every one who hears me will instantly respond, Locke. This great master of human reason thus expresses himself:—"Reason tells us that all men have a right to their subsistence." "We know," he again says, "that God has *not* left one man so to the mercy of another that he may starve him if he please. God, the Lord and Father of all, has given no one of his children such a property in his peculiar portion, but that he has given his brother a *right* to the surplusage of his goods, so that it cannot justly be denied him when his pressing wants call for it." He puts a case which the enemies of a legal provision for the poor urge will inevitably happen, but which I deny ever has, and I contend never will, namely, when this right of poverty and distress shall press hard upon, if not exhaust, the property which has to support it—a circumstance which, I repeat, is wholly imaginary—"what," says Locke, "is to be done in this case? I answer, the fundamental law of nature being that all, as much as may be, should be preserved, it follows, that he that hath, and to spare, must remit something of his full satisfaction, and give way to the pressing and preferable *right* of those who are in danger to perish without it." Such is the deliberate doctrine of this great



authority, the literary father of English liberty, who to an understanding unmatched in its capacity thus united a benevolence as unbounded. Blackstone, in his admirable work adverting to this right of the poor, and to the compulsory provision which it dictates, declares the Poor Law to be dictated by the very principles of society. Lastly, let Paley speak as to this point; Paley, who, one of the greatest ornaments of the last age, was the subject the other night of the deserved eulogy of one of the most powerful minds of the present day; Paley says, the poor have a right to this provision, "a claim founded upon the law of nature;" this he dwells upon at much length, concluding thus: "When, therefore, the partition of property is rigidly maintained against the claims of impotence or distress, it is maintained against and in opposition to the intention of those who made it, and to His who is the supreme proprietor of everything, and who has filled the world with plenteousness for the sustentation and comfort of ALL he sends into it." Such are the opinions of Paley, and I might add to his those of the divines of this country; such as Tillotson, Sherlock, Butler, and multitudes of others, who took no superficial or fanatical views of the great doctrines of their religion, but saw them in the lights of philosophy and truth.

I will not weary the attention of this House, by appealing to the great lights of the law, such as Bacon, Sir Matthew Hale, and many others, who are equally explicit, as to the absolute right of the poor to legal and legislative relief. So much, then, for the RIGHT of the poor.

Now if the right of the poor to relief in their distresses be thus fully recognised, to urge the fitness and expediency of its establishment would be to betray the argument instead of supporting it. I may, however, just remark, that the main question as to the policy of Poor Laws rests upon their effect upon population, and, singular is it to say, the two opposite notions on this important subject concur in this, the expediency of a provision for the poor. Those who imagine that such provision has a tendency to pre-

serve and increase the numbers of the people, and who also believe, what the history of every country upon earth has hitherto proved, namely, that with every such increase the comforts, and even superfluities, of life are more than proportionately augmented, and hence that growing numbers under judicious and good management are only other terms for augmenting prosperity,—I say, such are of course advocates for the preservation of the poor. On the other hand, those who have imbibed the unhappy and erroneous notion that there is that in the principle of human increase which has a constant tendency to excess, and consequent misery, have now, I believe, many of them arrived at the conclusion that Poor Laws have in their operation the effect of checking, instead of unduly encouraging that increase. Whichever view of the subject therefore is taken, the expediency of a national provision for the poor is equally acknowledged.

But it may be, and is often contended by those who object to a legal provision, that an optional one would in all cases be preferable. But I totally deny this, and, amongst many others which I shall omit to enumerate, for these important reasons:—first, it would impose the duty of sustaining the poor exclusively upon the benevolent, not always the most numerous, and very rarely the most wealthy part of the community; laying upon them, if the poor should be adequately relieved, an intolerable burden, from which too many of those who ought to sustain their full share of it, would wholly excuse themselves: then it would substitute, instead of a regular and certain, a casual and variable supply, and in many cases where relief is the most indispensable, and its administration required with the greatest promptitude, it would be deferred too late, or be totally and fatally withheld. It would change a system which ought to be regularly operative and permanently organised, into one of chance and accident; or otherwise demand a complication of machinery, and an individual attention in its management, which could never be generally obtained or be rendered permanent. Finally, it

would change that provision which is now administered, so as least to degrade those who receive it—who, notwithstanding all the cruel assertions to the contrary, are sometimes the most deserving, though the most unfortunate, part of the community—for a system of disgraceful mendicancy, with all its inseparable appendages of idleness, imposture, and depravity. And here I must observe, what indeed Hale has long ago asserted, that mendicancy cannot, on any principle of justice or policy, be suppressed, where a legal provision for the poor is not established. Common humanity could not, under such circumstances, endure to contemplate its discouragement. Hence, in every country where the poor are not legally sustained, this national pest and disgrace, mendicancy, is universally, and must remain perpetally, prevalent.

But, Sir, we have no authority whatever for substituting an imperfect and uncertain obligation in lieu of a perfect right, a right which, if it exists at all, is of the most sacred and indefeasible character. And let me ask such as are for thus defrauding the poor of legal relief, at the same time that they acknowledge their right to it, how such an attempt is reconcilable with the simplest ideas of justice?—How they would act regarding their own claims, not more sacred, not more essential, than those of the poor, were similar propositions made to them? Let me ask, for instance, that sacred profession, some few of the members of which (and thank God they are but very few) are adverse to the demands of the poor, whether they regard their own vested rights and legal endowments in the same light as they do those of poverty? They are learned enough to know that the rights which they are so anxious the poor should be bereft of, were anciently, and from the first, not only pronounced to be of the same nature, but were absolutely mixed up, nay indeed, identified, with those of their own function; that, on the first appropriations of property to sacred purposes, the priesthood and the poor were invariably copartners; and it is little in the proper spirit of their benevolent calling, that know-



ing the immense spoliations to which the poor have been already exposed, such should earnestly exhort that the legal provision which it was afterwards found necessary to enact in their behalf, should also be abrogated ; and an optional, variable, and uncertain relief substituted. Let these ask themselves whether, as ministers or professors, they would prefer to depend on weekly and eleemosynary collections, extorted by means of constantly repeated entreaties, or on those certain funds which the law has assured to them. If this question needs an answer, Burke has given it, but he has given it in behalf of the pauper as well as of the priest—that it is not fitting that either should be left to the unsteady and precarious contribution of individuals ; hence he has engaged for this country, that it will never seek its resources from the confiscation of the rights of the church, or of the poor. In a word, if the poor have a right to relief, the attempt to substitute, instead of the perfect obligation it implies, an imperfect one, is a direct insult upon the plainest principles of justice ; the poor, as Paley has emphatically asserted, being legally as much entitled to relief, as the rich are to their estates.

But there is a further view than is at first apparent in this proposed substitution of an optional for a legal relief of the poor, and it is this : the hope of getting rid of most of the charge this duty implies by degrees, and at length, perhaps, altogether. It is imagined, and indeed has been often said, that some “ little attentions,” “ cheap and simple presents of courtesy,” “ kind words,” and “ affectionate language,” would sooth the sorrows and sufferings of poverty, so as at length to coax it out of existence ; at all events, education would entirely cure the grievance, and be the annihilation of that condition. But this idea is as absurd as it is selfish : that “ the poor will never cease out the land”—the assertion of the most ancient and sacred of the legislators of antiquity, whose institutions, nevertheless, were more favourable to the relief of the condition of poverty, than any others ever established in the world—is true of every state of society,



and will ever remain so. It is not possible to rid any country of what many consider as its nuisance and disgrace, nor is it perhaps desirable, were it even possible. The condition in which poverty stands in relation to wealth, exercises the best feelings and noblest virtues of the human heart, whether of compassion on the one hand, or of gratitude on the other ; its due relief reconciles the otherwise discordant elements of society, and unites in the bonds of interest and affection the whole social system ; while, in a political point of view, poverty, or rather the fear of poverty, which could only be inspired by its actual existence, calls forth all that activity, and animates all those exertions, by which not only the independence of the individual is secured, but the public prosperity enlarged and perpetuated. Meantime the victims of misfortune, who lay claim to that humble pittance which the law awards, and which nature stands ready to bestow, have enough of sorrow and suffering in their cup of life to prevent their voluntarily sinking into that condition which some so falsely represent to be one, not only of idleness, but even of indulgence and luxury. Yes, Sir, the poverty we seek to relieve will never cease ; poverty of too deep and distressing a character to be tickled by the ready but empty hand of wealth, into mirth and pleasure. It would neither satisfy our feelings nor the wants of those we wish to relieve, thus to "carry about an alms basket of words," serving our own selfish purposes, while we made pretence of assisting the poor—to exhibit the charity of the priest in the fable, willing enough to give a blessing, but refusing to bestow the least relief—in a word, the "Be thou warmed and be thou clothed" scheme of recent economists. "The poor ye have alway with you," says the Author of Christianity, and the obligation of solacing and supporting them he has constituted one of the most important and onerous of all the duties his religion prescribes, and one imposed principally upon the wealthy, and not upon the poor and wretched ; who, contrary, as it appears to me, to every principle of reason and religion, are recommended by a great modern

authority to relieve each other's wants out of their "littles;"—littles indeed they are in reference to their individual necessities, but they would be much less were these unnatural demands made upon them. A legal system of charity on the contrary, in entire concurrence with the doctrines of religion and common sense, "charges the rich," with the duty of sustaining the poor in their affliction, and according to their means.

But the most numerous and honest of the objectors against a legal provision for the poor, disencumber themselves of these flimsy substitutes for the right in question, and unhesitatingly assert it as their opinion, that the poor ought to be made to sustain themselves in their afflictions and distresses, by saving sufficient for that purpose. Nothing, however, can exceed the absurdity of such a proposal. It is not only absurd, it is impossible. Let us turn our attention for a moment towards those who are the objects of relief. The desolate orphan, for instance—how is this forlorn being to provide itself with this necessary fund?—or even the man in the prime of life, just entered upon his active labours, stricken suddenly by the act of God, as our ancestors expressed themselves, or wasted by lingering disease, or deprived of his limbs by some of those accidents to which his employment too often exposes him—how is he to amass this fund? Other peculiar cases, numerous as they are afflicting, might be presented; but I go at once to the more general condition of the poor, and totally deny the possibility of this funding system, even regarding those of them whose health and strength have been the least interrupted. Let those who have the face to propose this plan to save their own property, expound to us how the great bulk either of the agricultural labourers or manufacturing operatives are to save. The question is, how they shall exist; and that, I fear, is becoming rather problematical to hundreds of thousands at this moment. And let them tell us next, to what amount they must save to obviate the necessity of the poor's rate? A simple calculation will answer this. One hundred and



fifty millions in the Savings Banks would not suffice. But this is not all, nor yet the principal part of what the proposal involves. As none of the working classes can foresee on which of them those calamities which may need relief will fall, so each must save in order to meet the average demand: nor would even this be sufficient; each must accumulate so as to provide against not merely the average, but the extreme cases of distress, in which manifold the ordinary relief is required; at least, if this assistance, which exposes the distressed poor to these constant and vituperative attacks, is to be dispensed with. Why, Sir, a second national debt would not suffice for this notable scheme of destroying pauperism, by making the poor universal savers. All the circulating medium, about which so much has been said, paper or metallic, transferred at once into their pockets, would go but a very little way to realize this absurd proposal.

But supposing all these impossibilities fully surmounted; out of what part of their expenditure must the poor save at all? They must consume less food, especially animal food, perhaps none of the latter; they must deny themselves the beverage which sustains and rewards their labour; they must go henceforth in rags; they must surrender those comforts and decencies which, in the times of their prosperity, have rendered their cottages so unrivalled as the abodes of industrious and contented labour. And should they do this, as it is one of the plainest maxims in political economy that the remuneration of labour bears a pretty exact proportion to the habitual wants and expenditure of those who render it, would not their wages fall in the same proportion as their comforts had been sacrificed? The fact is, as Petty observed long ago, nothing but necessity induces man to labour at all, and the bulk of mankind will never labour beyond what is adequate to supply their habitual wants. Besides, who does not see that if this saving were possible and universal, it would, in point of fact, be no saving at all; or, at least, produce the effect of none;



—but our political economists argue from exceptions. But supposing, I repeat, that this universal saving were possible; and that there were no obstacles in the way of such a scheme, do those who propose it recollect that the mass of the community are at once not only the sole producers, but the principal consumers? What then would be the effect of this universal parsimony amongst the poor? You would get rid for the moment of some of your expense, but you would nearly annihilate your income; you would desolate your pastures, close your manufactories, and empty your exchequer; in a word, you would become national bankrupts, with the consolation of knowing that you richly deserved your fate, by carrying into execution a proposition of such infinite folly and cruelty.

But the truth is, that those who argue this question upon selfish, and therefore impolitic and unwise, grounds, too often care but little what methods are adopted regarding the poor, so that they involve no expense; in fine, they are well content to leave poverty to find its own level, to adopt the phraseology of the day, as applied to many other topics. The consequences of such a course have been often and long witnessed. In Ireland it is so left; hence the potatoe system, as it is significantly termed, prevails, because none other can; hence rags constitute the clothing of the bulk of the people; hence their cabins justify the appellation which Spenser so long ago applied to them—sties, destitute of all the decencies and comforts, and what would here be deemed the necessaries, of life. Hence, also, in Scotland, where the poor are only partially relieved, in conformity with this wretched and degrading system, similar distress prevails. As a most intelligent witness from that country deposed before a Committee of the other House, “Where the Poor Law is not introduced, there are a great many of the miseries which are found in Ireland.” And as this system, if it can be called one, is recommended so strongly, and embraced so eagerly, by those who deem all that is expended on poverty a national loss, I shall just observe, with regard to Scotland,

that the evils I have alluded to as being found where no legal provision for the poor prevails, are there most conspicuous. An authority to whom the British empire owes so much (Sir John Sinclair), describes in one of his recent works the wretchedness to which the Scottish poor are doomed, affirming that the greater proportion of the labouring classes of that community hardly ever taste animal food. If we wish for confirmation of this fact, it may be found in any authentic accounts of the condition of those parts of Scotland (the Highlands in particular) where no provision for the poor is in operation. That condition has been fully described in a late number of the "Quarterly Journal of Agriculture," abundantly manifesting the superiority of the English system. As to the wretchedness of their clothing, the discomfort and filth of their cottages (that filth which is always the concomitant of abject poverty), and that disgusting mendicancy, which, as it is justly observed in the Edinburgh Encyclopædia, "is the pest that has long annoyed and oppressed her," none who have traversed those parts of that country where the Poor Law is not administered need to be reminded. And this is the condition to which the Legislature of the United Kingdom is often most gravely and piously implored to reduce the labouring poor of England!

But I must observe, in passing, that there is a Poor Law in Scotland, and of a nature very similar to that of this country. In the sixth parliament of James VI., Act 71, it was ordained that "the whole inhabitants within the parishes should be taxed and stinted for the needful sustentation of the poor and impotent, so that they may live unbeggared." I need not recite other unrepealed acts; it is a well-known fact, and has been recently solemnly adjudged in the courts of Scotland, that there, as here, any individual in absolute want has a legal claim to relief; and the refusal to yield it is therefore the result of a combination (conspiracy it ought to be called) among the rich, to intercept the relief which God and the laws award to any object of distress in that country also;—a direct contravention of the law, which deserves as



much vituperative reprehension, and as strong threatening of perdition, as, for instance, the evasion by a poor tradesman of a twopenny stamp duty; a divinity this of no modern date; one which most scrupulously pays its petty "tithes of mint, anise, and cummin," but utterly neglects "the weightier matters of the Law;" the Law of "justice and mercy" as well as that of the land.

But, waiving further remarks on these culpable evasions of the existing laws, I shall return to the main argument—the right of the poor to relief. This right, so undeniably clear and obvious, reinforced by the best feelings of humanity, and sanctioned also by the soundest policy, has ever been acknowledged. The heathen legislators universally recognised it;—all the free states of antiquity provided for the constant support of their indigent citizens; those of Greece especially, and in a manner which Aristotle, in his *Politics*, eulogizes most highly. The historian of Greece, our learned countryman Mitford, observes, that there was a poor law in Athens. In Rome we are well aware of the constant largesses bestowed on the poorer citizens. In her unfortunate rival, a similar provision prevailed. Beyond all these, the more ancient institutions of the Jews, as established by the greatest legislator and philosopher of antiquity, to designate him by no higher appellation—I mean Moses—fully recognised the right of indigence to relief, and legally provided for it. His laws, which though often now regarded as merely moral precepts, had in them, as Montesquieu has observed, the utmost legal force, were framed originally so as to protect and favour poverty more than any others ever promulgated in the world, and yet they still prescribed a provision for that casual distress which, he saw and declared, would, notwithstanding all his benevolent institutions, never cease out of the land; a provision which, transferred to this country, would, at the present moment, according to a calculation I have made, more than double the burdens imposed upon us for the relief of the poor, grievously as we complain of them. Those who have the slightest doubt upon the sub-



ject will do well to consult the work of the learned Selden, or his ancient authority Ben Maimon, whose exposition of the laws of Moses in relation to the poor is still extant. I will just remark, that, in addition to this ample legal provision for the distressed, Moses constantly enjoined the exercise of voluntary charity, in terms the most express, and enforced by considerations the most touching and solemn. So much for the dogmas of those who unhesitatingly declare that a legal provision for the poor is inconsistent with the exercise of real and voluntary charity; an assertion which, as made in this country, at once the most heavily taxed on account of poverty, and still the most celebrated for its voluntary works of charity and mercy, of any nation upon earth, is quite as false in fact as it is in theory.

Can there be a doubt whether Christianity weakened the obligation to make a certain and adequate provision for the poor—that religion of which a writer so eloquently alluded to the other evening, Bolingbroke, said, “that charity was its very brand!” Wherever that religion has spread, there have legal institutions in behalf of poverty prevailed. In some of its forms it may be doubted whether the provision has not been carried to a culpable excess, increasing and perpetuating, by actual and permanent temptations to idleness and improvidence, that poverty it was intended only to relieve. History informs us how early a Poor Law was introduced amongst ourselves. It was established by the father of our monarchy, and the founder of our liberties,—Alfred. He ordained, as one of our earliest law books informs us, that the poor should be sustained by the parsons and inhabitants of the parishes, so that none should die for want of sustenance; a provision substantially the same as that which is now happily established amongst us. In all the Catholic countries of Europe we know the extent and splendour of the endowments for the poor. In the Protestant ones, another, and I think, a preferable, system prevails, namely, a direct Poor Law, which connects moral superintendence with charitable relief. This is the case, for instance, in Switzerland; in Sweden; in Den-

mark ; in Norway. Even Iceland, poor as she is, is not too poor to have a law for the relief of the indigent. Holland, it need not be said, had very early in its history the same institution, and has long been a pattern to the world for the exemplary manner in which the poor are there sustained. In the Netherlands there is a similar law in full operation. In France, where the spoliation of the Revolution ruined so many of the rich, and seized also upon the funds for poverty and distress, the public revenue is beginning to be disbursed for the relief of indigence, and a regular system is gaining ground throughout the country. In the New World also, where we had been taught by some to suppose that no poor, nor laws for their relief, existed, we know, on the contrary, that the most liberal and efficient system of legal charity ever established is in full operation, involving, as far as our information hitherto extends, an expense to which even England is a stranger. Thus, for instance, the poor of the city of New York cost the public not far short of 200,000 dollars annually, and those of Philadelphia upwards of 100,000; sums which strike us as surprisingly large when we consider the cheapness of provisions and the great demand for, and high price of, labour, and what vast tracts of uncultivated lands of the most fertile description are every where found. In proof of the liberality with which our transatlantic brethren sustain their poor, Dr. Dwight may be appealed to, or Warden, who estimates the annual cost of their paupers as amounting to forty-five dollars each.

I might extend these proofs of the universality of a national provision for the poor even beyond the limits of Christendom. It exists in the East, and especially in the Mahomedan countries; nay, even in China, where, notwithstanding the present age has in extreme simplicity supposed the population to be so excessive as to render it necessary for the people to kill their children, and to eat almost any thing but each other from sheer want,—in China, Sir, there are poor laws, perfectly adapted to the condition and habits of the country, in full operation, and carried to an extent unknown in the Western



World, affording a direct provision to all beyond a certain and not very advanced age, and prescribing that lands shall be awarded on advantageous terms to those who want employment and subsistence; an institution to which, perhaps, the unrivalled perfection of their minute cultivation, while that on a large scale is confessedly so contemptible, may be fairly attributed. Whichever way we turn, therefore, we see a system of national charity completely established, except in one country, and that country is found, unhappily, in our own European empire; and, still more lamentable is the fact, in that part of it where such an institution is more than in any other indispensably necessary. But I shall not dwell further upon these instances,—though embodying as they do the feelings, principles, and experience of mankind in all ages and countries of the world, they are of the highest importance to the argument. It is enough to have simply appealed to the fact, that in almost every country under the sun where the rights of human beings are at all recognised, and where the public institutions are professedly founded upon them, there is a legal provision made for poverty, which is the more efficient the further such nations may be advanced in knowledge and character. So true is the observation of our great moralist, Dr. Johnson,—“A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization.”

Now, Sir, let us ask, Why is it that in Ireland, an integral part of an empire which has long taken the lead in every thing charitable and excellent, and in providing for the indigent more especially—why is it that in Ireland this right, recognised and established in every other civilized nation, has been resisted to the present hour? Is it that there is no necessity for this provision, or that the Irish are a caste so degraded that they have lost their natural right to it, or that property is there absolved from the duty it owes to poverty, by some undefined immunity which it enjoys in no other country, and which it would be its lasting disgrace to plead, even if it existed? or lastly, is it that there is no constantly existing and unalleviated suffering in Ireland, which demands



this systematic and perpetual relief? These suppositions, Sir, are too absurd to be for one moment entertained, and I wish not to mix up a subject so serious and important, with the ridiculous. No, Sir, circumstances peculiar to Ireland render the introduction of a national provision infinitely more necessary there than in any other part of the empire. I will again repeat some of its grievances: and first of these that acknowledged bane of Ireland, absenteeism, which has existed, and indeed gone on increasing, for many centuries, abstracting the wealth, and lessening the demand for labour; its concomitants, under-letting, exorbitant rents, and those clearings and drivings of the peasantry which render their constant condition so wretched; those fluctuations in the seasons and the crops common to the island, that place the unprovided multitudes at once on the very verge of famine, and indeed often push many into its gulf; and, lastly, this constant poverty, and occasional extreme want, superinducing that disease which never wholly leaves Ireland, and which is sometimes heightened to so frightful a degree, that thousands are swept away in its dreadful ravages; (a calamity which all the medical authorities I have consulted, attribute to an insufficiency of the necessaries of life;) I say all these circumstances most loudly and solemnly pronounce the establishment of a Poor Law in Ireland as more necessary than probably in any other country in Christendom. Nor must we lose sight of the interests of the poor of this country, which I repeat imperiously demand a regulation that should prevent those influxes of labourers of every kind, who, either starved out of their own country, or attracted to this by the advantages of a superior system, are constantly crowding to our shores, to the infinite detriment of our own industrious classes. But regarding the justice and necessity of a provision for the poor of Ireland, in reference merely to their own condition, I will beg leave to quote the authority of an early and distinguished advocate for the measure, who has put the argument in such a manner as to render it irresistible, whether addressed to the understanding or the

feelings,—a writer, moreover, who published more than three-score years ago, when the population of that country little exceeded two millions and a half. I mention this to anticipate the objections of those who may choose to attribute the misery of Ireland to excessive numbers, and who consequently confine their remedies to recissory measures only—whose argument it is difficult to deal with, because it is quite as regardless of historical facts as it is of patriotic feelings. The admirable author to whom I allude is Dr. Woodward, bishop of Cloyne. It is difficult to reject any part of his reasoning, not a word of which is redundant; I must however, on this occasion, confine myself to a few short extracts. He entitles his work “An Argument in Support of the Right of the Poor of the Kingdom of Ireland to a National Provision;” and it shows throughout, that he had then to encounter an opposition founded on the pretended “enormous expense, the exorbitance of the poor rates, &c.,” of this country; or, in other words, the threatened “absorption of rents,” which is still so generally but falsely put forth as an overwhelming objection. I shall first quote this excellent prelate’s opening sentence: “That the lower class of our people are very ill accommodated with lodging, raiment, and even food, is but too manifest to all who are acquainted with their manner of living. That their poverty is like to continue with but little mitigation, will be evident to any intelligent man, who reflects on the following, among other causes of it: the *exorbitant rent* extorted from the poorer tenants, ever loath and afraid to leave their ancient habitations, by the general method of letting farms to the highest bidder, without any allowance of a tenant’s right: the system of letting large tracts of lands to undertakers, inured to tyranny and extortion, as prejudicial to the landlord as to the under tenant: and the low rate of the wages of labour. These circumstances, combined with some others, reduce the Irish cottager below the peasant of almost every country in Europe. Such is his hard condition, in the most plentiful season, and in the prime of his health and strength: what

then must be his state in time of dearth, under the pressure of years, infirmities, or even a very numerous family? He is a stranger to luxury, or even to decent accommodation, and yet his wages seldom afford any reserve. On the death of such a father of a family, dependent on his labours for their main or perhaps entire support, how forlorn must be the condition of his widow and orphan children! It would shock a tender mind, if imagination could paint the miseries to which the bulk of the inhabitants of this kingdom are constantly exposed by the slightest reverse of fortune; by a single bad season; by an accidental loss; by an occasional disease, or worn down by the gradual decay of nature. Nor are these affecting scenes confined to seasons of scarcity; they must always exist in a great, though not equal, number. They present themselves but too often to every country gentleman, and still more to the clergy, in the exercise of their parochial duties (to whose experience we appeal), to need a proof. They cannot be doubted or denied by any, but those who shut their eyes, or steel their hearts against them. So numerous, so urgent and well known, are the distresses of the poor. Let us now fairly estimate the sufficiency of the resources at present subsisting for their relief. Our eyes will naturally be turned first to the landed gentlemen, who derive their wealth and importance from the labour of these men." (Is not this a truth, and if so, is it no argument?) "Of these," continues this clergyman, "many, perhaps a majority of the most considerable, constantly reside in another kingdom; and though some of them may cast back a part of their superfluity on those to whose industry they owe their all, yet it is to be feared that such instances are very rare." "On the contrary," says he, "it is too frequently urged, as a recommendation of Irish property, that it is not encumbered with any tax for the maintenance of the poor!"—He wonders how such a phrase should be so familiarized to the ear of any wise or good man as to lose its genuine horror. "If the sentiment were developed," he adds, "few would entertain it, and still fewer avow it; no ingenuous reader will therefore think it invidious or



unnecessary, in this interesting argument, to lay open its plain import, which is this : an estate in this country is represented as peculiarly advantageous to the landlord, because, though he may, and generally does, avail himself of the utmost profit that can be drawn from the labour of the tenant (leaving him too scanty a present maintenance), he is nevertheless at liberty to abandon that labourer to perish, when he is unable to work any longer. Is this boasted privilege either honourable or desirable? A wise man would not glory in such an exemption, a good man would not claim it, and he who wishes to enjoy, does not deserve it." He thus combats the argument too often put forth in favour of depriving the poor of their rightful claim to relief, for the purpose of substituting it by an optional sort of charity, a very favourite notion with some, for reasons sufficiently obvious. "It cannot be denied but that far the greatest part of our lands do not enjoy the benefit of the proprietor's residence, and in general the poor of these estates partake not of his charity. Now," says he, "when we have weighed, on one side, the extraordinary indigence of the whole peasantry, and allowed, on the other, for the number of absentees from the kingdom, the remoteness of many estates from the mansions of the resident gentry (which together render it no uncommon case to find a tract of country containing some scores of square miles without one family of note), it will be intuitively clear, that there can be no balance, nor indeed the least proportion, between the necessities of the poor tenants and the alms of their landlords." Then, regarding that method of relief which some are so anxious should remain the principal source of support in that country, and indeed become so in this—that of obliging the poor to sustain each other, he expresses himself in terms of just indignation, both as to the cruel selfishness and utter inadequacy of any such mode. I will just quote further the words in which he sums up his unanswerable argument in favour of the right of the poor, agreeably to the plainest rules of reason and the fundamental principles of civilization. "It would be a waste of

words," says he, "and a disgrace to reasoning, to labour to prove a point so clear as this, that the richer members of society, who are the minority, have no right to exclude the lower class, who are a majority, from any portion of the public patrimony, without securing to them the resource of a subsistence; when they must otherwise be reduced to the dreadful alternative of breaking through those regulations, or of perishing by a dutiful observance of them." The Bishop goes on to particularise those to whom he would have the relief which a national provision would ensure, administered. They are: 1. The infant poor. 2. The sick poor. 3. The aged poor. Alluding to the latter, he has this remark: "If at the close of life they become a burden, and having only to plead their former services, they have not that plea allowed from reasons of policy, it would be a still higher degree of economy, and even mercy, to adopt the refined Indian policy of putting an immediate end to them." Even as it regards the improvident and profligate poor, this admirable Christian philosopher would not warrant their utter desertion, though as compared with the unfortunate merely, he would make a just and proper distinction. And who could determine otherwise, that is conscious of his own imperfections or his duties? I will terminate my quotation from him with what he says on this subject:—"If we may, without injury to the state, (and must, if we expect mercy ourselves,) relieve the distress, though we blame the cause, wherein consists the inexpediency of obliging those of the rich, who are too distant or dissipated to know, or too callous to regard, the misery of the poor, to contribute to its relief, and not to throw the whole burden, as at present, on the resident, the considerate, and the benevolent; for a legal provision has this double advantage over voluntary alms, that it is at once more equitable to those who pay, and more equal and effectual to those who receive. But if no reasoning can justify such obduracy as would permit a wretch to languish without help in age and sickness, because he had not made a provident use of his



health and strength, on what principle shall we conclude, from the imprudence of the parent, against all compassion to the orphan children? On what pretext shall we exclude from the public care the distresses of the laborious and frugal, which were owing neither to their own nor their parents' political sins, but took their rise from high rents and low wages; from the scarcity of food, or the check of a manufacture; from the sudden increase of family, or the death of cattle; from disease, unassisted by medicine, and, in consequence perhaps of that want of help, the untimely loss of an industrious father?" He goes on to state many other facts and reasons in behalf of the introduction of legal relief for the poor of his country, and has answered by anticipation, most ably, all that has been urged against so excellent a measure. He has shown its peculiar necessity and fitness, and the other advantages with which it would be attended, even in reference to important objects other than merely that under his consideration. To the honour of his function and of his memory, he was one of the first, if not the very first, who pressed upon the public, at any considerable length, the necessity of the extension of national relief to the poor of Ireland. His proposition, which I now re-urge in this House, may perhaps be awhile resisted; but backed as it is by the highest duties and best feelings of humanity, it will assuredly prevail.

But it may be said that the distresses under which Ireland laboured, when her population was so scanty, have much abated since it has so greatly enlarged, and that, therefore, this national institution of charity is the less necessary. Sir, I am as fully aware of the advantages of an increasing population, under proper regulation, as any man, but in no state of society can poverty be wholly abated; in none will it be found in such a condition as not to demand constant and permanent relief; and in that of Ireland least of any. Sir, it is unnecessary for me, I think, further to describe the state of destitution in which Ireland is still plunged, and from which it will never be extricated till you



adopt a permanent system of relief. The condition of the peasantry is known to most Gentlemen who hear me, it is known to myself—and I speak on that knowledge, and on the authority of numerous documents that I might adduce, some of which I have recently received from various parts, and one this day, of an affecting character, from the metropolis of Ireland; but with extracts from these, however, I shall not now distress the House: I will merely point to the miserable condition of the country when one of those visitations befalls it, which a material deficiency of the crop invariably occasions. This will give more distinctly the features of that misery which constantly prevails there, though with considerable fluctuations. The failure of a crop not only causes that general distress to which the prelate I have just quoted so touchingly alludes, but it superinduces that disease which is still more dreadful; so that whatever has been the state of population, whether large, as at present, or small, as in former times, that epidemic has constantly prevailed in the country, which on these lamentable occasions has rapidly spread, and produced consequences the distressing nature of which can hardly be exaggerated. But the destitution which oppresses so large a part of the people, and its effects, are constantly experienced; like a lingering disease, which is often as afflictive in its partial remissions as in its exacerbations, and, perhaps, in the instance of Ireland, more deplorable, as in the extreme cases the sympathies of the Empire are excited, and relief is at last, though tardily and imperfectly, administered. Now, Sir, we learn from all the best authorities on the subject, that the fever which has so long returned upon Ireland as its deadly scourge, and which its medical writers pronounce to be never wholly extinct, arises from the suffering and distress, the wretchedness and penury, to which the people are constantly exposed, and of which they are so often the victims; and from the recurrence of which nothing but an organized system of national relief, and funds supplied for that purpose by law, will ever secure Ireland. Look at the last of these painful visitations. Was it fitting that the

country should have then been without a legal and national charity? The death of thousands, and the ruin of tens of thousands, are plainly attributable to this infamous neglect. The fever originated, as Drs. Barker and Cheyne observe, in their valuable history of that pest, in a great measure from want and destitution, heightened by the melancholy and gloom which fell upon the people from a sense of their utterly hopeless condition. Deprived of labour and of bread by the evils to which I have before repeatedly alluded; many of them driven forth from their habitations totally destitute and unprovided for, they subsisted solely upon casual gleanings, of unwholesome food, unnatural and disgusting to human beings; even the relief derived from mendicancy was often denied to them, for, as the same writers observe, the moving mass of hopeless misery which was then afloat, was frequently repulsed from the towns into which it sought entrance in the hope of relief—some died of direct famine, and many of the same dreadful evil in a more lingering form, neglected and deserted in their cabins or their “fever huts;” or wholly without habitations or shelter of any kind, exhausted and overcome with disease, not a few of them expired in the highways and hedges. Sir, the volumes I hold in my hand give most afflicting proofs of these dreadful statements; and though they never directly advert to the proposition to which I am addressing myself, but merely comprise a record of facts, they present the strongest evidence in favour of a system of legal charity that could possibly be adduced. But how melancholy are their contents! They are like the roll described by the sacred seer of old, written within and without with mourning, lamentation, and woe. I had intended to read from these official reports a few statements as an evidence of their general contents; but I forbear to fatigue too much this House in this necessarily long discussion.\* Let it suffice to say that these accounts verify the

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\* “A volume might be filled with instances in proof of the distress occasioned by this visitation of fever, amongst a people

fact of the constant existence of fever in Ireland, and attribute it to the poor and scanty food, the insufficient clothing, and the wretched habitations of the people. They describe the poor, in many parts of Ireland, as having then subsisted on the unwholesome and unnatural food gleaned from the fields, or from the putrid remains of fish gathered on the shores ;—and that even these supplies were insufficient ;—but I shall not harrow up the feelings of the House, by further advertg to the distressing details these volumes present. Sir, will any man assert that optional charity did or could perform the duties the country owed to its distressed poor, in scenes and at a season like this ? Can any one dare to assert that in point of fact the poor were adequately relieved at this period, or that the wealthy of Ireland and

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already exhausted by the privations consequent on want of employment, and scarcity of food. In parts of the country remote from the capital, we have heard frequent mention of, and have seen what were termed, fever huts. These were wretched structures of mud or stone, not exceeding four or five feet in height, erected at the road sides, or in the corners of fields, for the purpose of receiving persons attacked with fever ; either members of a family, removed there for the purpose of preventing the extension of sickness, or wretched wanderers in search of food or employment, thus compelled to struggle with a formidable disease on the damp ground, with little covering but the miserable clothing worn by day, and scarcely protected from the inclemency of the weather by the shed of straw or boughs which formed the roof of this wretched habitation. Although such precautionary measures were adopted by the poor to prevent fever, arising from their conviction of its contagious nature, yet in numerous instances those whom the disease had seized were obliged to occupy the same bed with the healthy, thus extending infection through a whole family ; and when several individuals, so circumstanced, had been involved in this calamity, the dead have remained for days by the side of the languishing survivors.”

The following is an extract from the report of one of the physicians, Dr. O'Leary, which immediately succeeds the foregoing statement :—“ Three or four patients have literally died in the streets, or by the side of the ditches, for many were obliged to sleep in the fields. Fever huts were erected on the passage to the church, either on or near all the public roads, and on the fair field. One of these remained, occupied by a sick family, on the



especially the absentees made even an attempt for that purpose? Let me not, however, be understood to affirm that distress so overwhelming perpetually prevails there—I do not say that it always rose to that height; but a dark flood of suffering constantly rests upon that unhappy country, though ever and anon a swelling wave may thus sweep over its surface, and engulf it in deeper and more universal misery. But though, Sir, equal distress may not always exist, yet I do maintain that much prevails at all times which demands, as it admits of, constant relief, and much that nothing but the introduction of a legalized national charity will ever permanently alleviate.

In further and full proof of the constant existence of this

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fair day, to the terror of those who attended the September fair. A woman of the family died since by the ditch side, of a relapse. In ascertaining the persons to be relieved from the Government charity, I have gone into a hut, where, owing to the lowness of the entrance, I could only feel the pulse of the four inmates, a father and three children, of the name of Stunton. There were also two grown-up daughters, who were obliged to remain for several nights in the open air, not having room in the hut till the father died, when the stronger of the two girls forced herself into his place. On the road leading to Cork, within a mile of this town, I visited a woman, of the name of Vaughan, labouring under typhus; on her left lay a child very ill; at the foot of the bed another child, just able to crawl about; and on her right, the corpse of a third child, who had died two days previously, and which the unhappy mother could not get removed. When the grant arrived from Government, I visited a man of the name of Brahill, near the chapel-gate, who, with his wife and six children, occupied a very small house, all of them ill of fever, with the exception of one boy, who was so far convalescent as to creep to the door to receive charity from the passengers. These are a few of the instances of the wretchedness which prevails in this town."

Dr. Osborne, of Cork, stated, that in one instance, a physician, in attendance on the poor, had to separate two children from the bed of their dead brother, the father and mother being already in a fever hospital. In another instance, he had to remove an infant from the corpse of its mother, who had just expired in a hovel.

"The following is an extract of a communication received by the Editors of this work from Mr. Nolan, of Wicklow, which may also serve to exemplify the distresses of the poor in Ireland from the

general suffering and distress in Ireland, I will make a last, and I think decisive, appeal, not founded upon mere personal observation, nor dictated by any authority, however respectable, but having in itself the force of obvious and irresistible truth. In the last census of Ireland, the exactness and accuracy of which does the highest credit to Mr. Mason Shaw, the population, as in this country, is divided into ages. And, Sir, making the children in each country, under five years old, to be the radix of the calculation, to every 10,000 of these there would be in England, according to the last census, 15,704 persons at and above the age of forty; whereas in Ireland there would be 11,522 only: above the age of fifty, the number in this country would be 9416, in Ireland 6483; the former exceeding the latter by one half;

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same cause:—‘ Previous to the opening of the hospital, many instances of extreme misery occurred: I would particularize the following; Ellen Fagan, a young woman, whose husband was obliged, in order to seek employment, to leave her almost destitute in a miserable cabin with three children, was induced one night to give the shelter of her roof to a poor beggar, who, it appears, had fever. The consequence was that she caught the disease; and from the terror and alarm created in the neighbourhood, was, with her three children, deserted, except that some persons left a little water and milk at the window for the children—one about four, another three years old, the third an infant at her breast. In this way she continued for a week, when a neighbour heard of her distress, and sent her a loaf of bread, which was left in the window. Four days after this he grew uneasy about her, and one night he prepared some tea and bread, and taking a female servant with him, set off to her relief. When he arrived, the following scene presented itself: in the window lay the loaf where it had been deposited four days previously; in one corner of the cabin, on a little straw, without covering of any kind, lay the wretched mother, actually dying, and her infant dead by her side, for want of that sustenance which she had not to give; on the floor lay two children, to appearance dying also of cold and hunger. At first they refused to take any thing, and he had to force a little liquid down their throats; in a short time they revived, and with the cautious administration of food recovered the effects of their suffering. The woman expired before the visitor quitted the house.’ This report adds that those in comfortable circumstances were very rarely affected by this terrible epidemic.” See *Barker and Cheyne’s Account of the late Epidemic Fever in Ireland*, Passim.



above sixty, in England the proportion is 4980, in Ireland 2560—nearly double therefore are found in existence in the former country; upwards of seventy, in England there are 1950; in Ireland 778; above eighty, here 440, there only 155. I am aware that there are considerations which would somewhat abate these grievous disproportions, were a great degree of precision necessary; they are not however of such a nature as could disturb the melancholy conclusion at which we must arrive, on examining these facts. Such then is the effect of leaving the poor unprovided for, upon the health and even life of the wretched victims of poverty and disease thus deserted. There may be those, by possibility, who will regard this statement as highly satisfactory; they who, inveighing against a supposed redundancy of population as the main source of national distress, have come to the complacent conclusion, that the rich alone ought to be the monopolists of existence as well as property, and that the poor have, in no case, “any claim as of right to the smallest portion of food”—(I quote one of them)—and, consequently, in the instances which I would remedy, no right whatever to live. But if reason and truth did not put down such horrible notions, the feelings and rights of human nature speedily would, the moment they became practically adopted.

But, Sir, supposing that, equally regardless of the claims of justice and the feelings of pity, we were to reduce the right of the poor to relief to a mere *argumentum ad crumenam*, even then I think, on referring to the expenses incurred in Ireland, ostensibly on their account, we should find that mere economy demands a national provision. First, if we advert to those large sums included in the grand jury presentments, professedly appropriated to the employment of the poor, but which, it is as notorious as the sun at noon-day, are often nothing better than direct jobs, corrupting the rich, instead of relieving the destitute; and, secondly, if we consider the indirect expenses the present pernicious system involves, which also form so large and melancholy an item in the same accounts, namely, the charge of prosecuting and punishing, imprisoning and trans-



porting, those whose offences originate in abject poverty and want of employment, which, as Sir Matthew Hale argues, fill the prison, and feed the gallows and the gibbet,—and if to these immense disbursements were added, as I am persuaded there ought to be, much of the expense the constabulary establishment occasions, and no inconsiderable part of that of the standing army there, which is mainly necessary to put down those disorders which, as a late Secretary of Ireland well observed, have constantly originated in local distress or oppression : then, Sir, I think it would be seen that by that change of system which should substitute charity for coercion, you might gain millions. You would gain more than those millions; in the peaceful and gratified demeanour of an affectionate peasantry; in their awakened gratitude and devotion to a country and a constitution which had at length considered them in their low estate, had relieved them in their distresses, and given them a heritage, however humble, in the land of their fathers. Nor would the advantages rest even here, great as these are; in giving employment to those that are in that idleness which is now sustained, and which consumes, like a canker, the national resources—employment, which ought to be rendered indispensable to any system of relief you would contemplate to introduce, and for which there is in Ireland a present sphere beyond any other country upon earth, you would develop the resources of the country, add to its fertility and multiply its wealth; and connect with all these mighty advantages a perpetuity of prosperity which nothing thenceforth could disturb or destroy.

Yes, Sir, notwithstanding the repeated and confident assertions to the contrary, there is not in the world a sphere where human labour might be more beneficially employed; whether on the millions of uncultivated acres, now wholly unproductive, or on those which, though cultivated, are not, with reference to their potential productiveness, half tilled; or in those inexhaustible mines of wealth beneath the fertile surface, hitherto almost wholly unexplored—in many of the noble rivers of the island,—on all its shores,—and, sur-

rounding these, in those wastes of the ocean which offer their supplies with unfailing certainty, and in quantities literally inexhaustible, means, Sir, of profitable employment arise in every direction ; of employment, which would at once advance the people in all the arts of civilization ; invest the country with additional health and beauty, and crown it with increasing plenty. Strange that while nature herself thus solicits us to engage in those magnificent tasks, which await future generations, it should be the present policy to slight the means by which they can alone be accomplished, —human beings ; to pronounce these redundant in numbers, and expel them from the country on pain of starving them in it.

Under all these circumstances, then, and after mature consideration, I have arrived at the conclusion that not only is a legal provision for the poor in Ireland the most just and necessary, but that it would be the most beneficial of all national measures. It would discourage idleness ; it would raise the value of labour, now so distressingly low ; it would promote economy and dispense comfort ; it would ensure peace —nay, it would diminish the expenditure, as well as the suffering and destitution, of the country ; it would not only be a blessing to the poor, but a boon to the benevolent, by compelling those who are the main cause of creating and aggravating the general distress, to contribute to its relief,—the absentees ; in one word, it would equally advantage every class of society, the benefactors and the benefited ; and, in the literal meaning of the term, it would be that mercy which is “twice blessed, which blesseth him who gives and him who takes.”

But there are objections, as applied to the introduction of this institution into Ireland, which are supposed to be peculiar to that country, and fatal to the proposition. The chief of these, indeed the only one at all worthy of notice, is this, that there is not the machinery there necessary to its due execution. But, Sir, I am fully persuaded that when this objection is duly considered, it will rise into an additional

argument for the necessity and policy of the measure. If it did not find that machinery, it would create it: it would either call forth the active exertions of those who are at present culpably negligent of their duties, or it would force back those who have wholly deserted them and their country; it would act upon those minds insensible to higher and better motives, by an inducement to which such are alone sensible, self-interest; it would interpose in its practical effect a barrier against cruelty and spoliation, however powerful; in a word, it would constitute property the guarantee of the rights of humanity. But, Sir, let us hear no more of this want of machinery. When the work of execution has to be perpetrated; when the demands of the landlord or the law have to be realized; when the peasantry of a district, reluctant and agonized, have to be driven forth from the homes of their forefathers—a sight which never grieves the eye or wrings the heart in this country, thanks to the Poor Laws of England; then, indeed, the machinery is at hand, and it is omnipotent for its purpose: but when the work of mercy is to be accomplished; when the sufferings of humanity have to be assuaged, and the duties we owe to our fellow beings discharged, that there could be no machinery found or created to effectuate such beneficent designs, is inconsistent with reason, and an insult upon our common nature. Sir, the supposed absence of that machinery which I maintain the enactment of Poor Laws for Ireland would either recal or create, is of itself no mean argument in favour of this just, merciful, and necessary measure. The moral police, which this system would inevitably establish, would of itself be worth all the expense it would involve. But, Sir, the assertion that there is now no machinery in Ireland, for so great and beneficial a purpose, is a libel upon the entire country. That bravery which is the characteristic of Ireland, assures us of its inseparable associate, compassion; and I hesitate not to say, that, confided to the middle ranks of society there, the funds of mercy would be as religiously guarded, and as conscienti-



ously appropriated, as in any community upon earth: Were there, however, no machinery at hand, it would become the duty of the Government to furnish it; and to do so, it might have been thought would be one of the easiest and most grateful tasks which could be imposed upon them; less difficult at all events, it may be presumed, than those which they often undertake, when the public coffers have to be replenished.

But to dismiss this, and many other objections, in order to attend to the one which, however disguised, I believe to be the great, if not the only, impediment to the measure, namely, the vast and growing expense which it is believed this institution would demand. And, Sir, this paramount objection is grounded upon a gross misconception, as to the supposed progress and effect of the Poor Laws in England, in a pecuniary point of view. I had meant, Sir, to enter into this part of the subject much at large, aware, as I am, of its importance to the argument. But I shall confine myself, in deference to the House and on account of the fatigue I have already occasioned it, to a very few statements. And, first, I utterly deny that the Poor Laws of England have occasioned a great and increasing expense. I hold in my hand, Sir, ample and irrefragable evidences of that important fact; from which, however, I shall only select a very few. Soon after the establishment of our national charity, the expense of maintaining the poor equalled one-third of the public revenue: it now amounts to one-ninth of it only. In 1680, the amount of the Poor Rates of England and Wales was £665,362, still one-third of the revenue, and bearing the same proportion to the exports. In 1776, the same institution imposed upon us a relatively diminished expense, namely £2,000,000, or one-fifth of the revenue, and one-seventh of the exports: while now the same expense is only equal to one-eighth part of the entire amount of the national revenue, or to about £6,500,000, one-tenth of the exports; the actual disbursement having, in the mean time, diminished, as calculated from 1818, above one million sterling. I shall not refer to the fallacious returns of the years 1747, 1748, and

1749, though they have of late been made the radix of the erroneous calculations that have been constantly put forth, officially or otherwise, on the subject; as it is a notorious fact, and one recorded in the histories and Parliamentary proceedings of the time, that they were so grossly deficient as to be utterly worthless; and I therefore call upon those who present those statements, year after year, to the public, either to withdraw or substantiate them. Even the two subsequent returns erred greatly in deficiency, as Mr. Gilbert, a Member of this House, at whose instance they were obtained, and who devoted his parliamentary life to the subject, asserted. And yet these also are now constantly published without his rectifications, prejudicing, therefore, the cause of the poor, and misleading this House and the public, on so important a point as that of the relative increase in the expense of sustaining them.

Then, Sir, the increase in the number of the poor has been equally mis-stated. To give but one among the many proofs which present themselves on this point: in the latter part of the seventeenth century, Gregory King, one of the most accurate statistical writers this country ever produced, calculated their number, including children, at 900,000. They were in 1803, when the children were also included, increased by one-tenth only—a great relative diminution therefore. Advert to the difference in the population, and not a single word by way of comment is necessary. In a word, the expense occasioned by the poor, and the number of those chargeable, has ever been the fruitful topic of declamation; but when seriously and fairly considered, we shall be compelled to coincide with one of the most intelligent and laborious writers that ever discussed this important subject, (Sir Frederick Morton Eden,) who, after making his historical collections regarding them, occupying three quarto volumes, comes to this conclusion—"The rise in the Poor Rates has has not kept pace with other branches of national expenditure, or even with our increased ability to pay them." This opinion will be yet more striking, when it is considered that in



the sums set down at present as the charges of the poor, one-fourth at least is disbursed as the mere wages of labour, owing to the pernicious system which now generally prevails in certain districts.

I had meant to have contrasted the system of sustaining the poor now established, with that of which it is plainly the substitute; but this also I will waive on the present occasion. I will only remark that a legal provision for the relief of the distressed is coeval with the rudiments of our Constitution—that the endowments specially appropriated to that and other religious purposes so greatly augmented, that they, at one time, amounted to a third of the property of the Kingdom; and when the last Henry, by an act of villanous spoliation, unexampled in any previous age or country of the world, confiscated the permanent funds of charity, and distributed them amongst his parasites and mercenaries, he promised, indeed, at the same time a better provision for the poor out of those spoils, like the French revolutionists; but he grossly violated his word, as did they. After that confiscation, Sir, the destitute poor were destroyed by multitudes; above 70,000 perished by the hands of the executioner in his reign; and an almost equal proportion in those of his successors, till at length the Poor Laws of England were established, which were drawn up, it is believed, by Bacon, and still remain his best and noblest work. The effect of these laws we have delivered to us by an eyewitness of both systems, Michael Dalton, a celebrated legal authority of that period, and who assures us, from his own experience, of the infinite advantage to society of a legal over an optional provision for the poor. Happy would it have been for Ireland had a similar change been introduced there, an omission deeply deplored by a contemporary writer. Then would its population, which still unhappily remains in the condition in which that of England then was, in idleness, degradation, and destitution, have risen, with equal steps, and to as high a degree of comfort, contentment, and happiness as our own;—a population which, notwithstanding



all the vituperations which have been levelled at it, is unrivalled, either in intelligence, industry, morality, or benevolence, by any other upon earth. And, Sir, I demand in their behalf, and, as a measure of defence, that a provision for their poor brethren of Ireland should be established, and without delay. ("Question," from two or three members.) Question! I will tell those gentlemen what is the question. The question is the comfort, the support, nay, the very existence, of the poor and destitute in Ireland; and if honourable Members can find avocations more worthy of legislators than the serious discussion of this question, they are at liberty to pursue them elsewhere. Labouring, as I do, under the evident effect of considerable indisposition, and obviously curtailing my argument, and selecting so sparingly as I am doing from the facts and documents I have in my hand, those cries of "Question!" are as unfeeling as they are indecent; they shall not, however, prevent me from proceeding on this occasion, nor deter me on any other, from resuming a subject which no men in this House, but those to whom I am alluding, can deny, is, in every point of view, of the deepest and most permanent importance. I shall not, however, now detain the House much longer, as I am myself still more wearied, and indeed exhausted, than those gentlemen can possibly be. I have consequently omitted many arguments which I meant to have advanced, and those that I have brought forward I am aware I have urged but too feebly. It is a cause, however, the success of which little depends upon its advocate; it makes those appeals at once to the understanding and the heart, which must render it finally triumphant. In the course of my argument, I have urged no new or unconstitutional claims; I have proposed no untried and theoretical expedients: I merely demand, in behalf of the poor of Ireland, their real and substantial rights—that people, whose whole condition you were last session exhorted to take into your consideration. You have seen good to wrest from them their political privileges; accord to them their natural rights—rights

sanctioned alike by the principles of civilization, the feelings of humanity, the doctrines of religion. I demand their restoration, not only in the behalf of the poor of Ireland, but in the name of the people of the United Empire, who are universally interested in this important measure; and whose voice, while pronouncing in favour of it, is, in this instance, whatever it may be in others, the voice of God!

Sir, I think, in the decision we come to this night, the character of this House is at stake, and I call upon it to act, with regard to all classes of society, with justice and impartiality. The claims of those who have served the public in high, honourable, and lucrative situations, have never been here disregarded. Ministers, judges, chancellors, and other servants of the crown; all public officers, civil, military, or naval; all ministers of the church, of every order and degree, are either secure for life of their respective offices and their emoluments, or of those retired allowances, which, in case of their removal, whether from long service, or otherwise, are awarded to them. These may have, and most of them actually do, possess ample private fortunes, and yet I say the munificence of the country either allows them to occupy their offices for life, or affords to them a liberal provision under the name of half-pay, pension, superannuation, or some denomination or other. Are these disbursements reckoned improper, immoral, degrading, when bestowed upon the wealthier classes of society? No. Vast as are the expenses so occasioned, when the fewness of the numbers benefited, is compared with those of the poor, they occasion no murmurs,—the shameless partiality and injustice inveighed against by the Roman satirist is again exemplified, *Da pretori, da deinde tribuno*,—but that the claims of the wretched and the indigent should be recognized by a country, which most of them have contributed to feed and to enrich; that the poor worn-out labourer, who has had the misfortune to survive his strength, should continue to receive a morsel from the fields which he may have

tilled for half a century ; or that a cripple, who has been maimed in the boasted manufactures of the country, which as it is alleged have so vastly augmented the national wealth, should be allowed a few daily pence at the public cost—that, with our political economists, sacred and profane, is the supposed grievance ; it is one, however, against which I trust this House will never inveigh ; it is one, I hope, and firmly believe it will, to its immortal honour, be anxious from every consideration, whether of policy or justice, to extend to Ireland. No, Sir, the Parliament of this country, which has constantly, and in this session, satisfied the claims of the more elevated applicants, will not, cannot, refuse to helpless indigence, when it can labour no longer, the little pittance which justice and mercy equally demand at its hands. I confidently anticipate a better course from this House. I trust it will justify that character which it has on all great occasions hitherto manifested ; and in which it has through life been my pride to regard it. When has it been that this branch of the legislature, however inveighed against on other grounds, has not shown itself as the guardian and refuge of the oppressed, the assertor of the real rights and interests of the people ; when has it not preferably leaned to the weakest and supported the feeblest that had justice on their side ? Sir, but a short time has elapsed since this House, which had long before swept from these shores the sight and contamination of personal slavery, recognized, by a great and godlike act, unexampled by any legislative assembly in any previous age, and in spite of national interests and remonstrances, the liberty of one quarter of the world, and became the avowed champion of the unhappiest of mankind, opening even to benighted Africa, as it may be confidently hoped, a career of future happiness and prosperity. And ages before, Sir, when public opinion was little known, and the popular voice was rarely heard ; when no press existed to watch its proceedings, or to prompt its course, at that period was it, that the parliament of England provided for the poor ; let the present one complete that great work,



and in extending the provision of that Act to Ireland, secure to that country future happiness, and to this also a greater measure of general prosperity. Then will national philanthropy and patriotism be complete, and this House will redeem itself from that imputed indifference to the rights and interests of the poor with which it is too often accused: then may every Briton adopt the exulting language of a hero of antiquity as paraphrased by one of our own poets, and apply it still more emphatically, to his own happy country—

“Safe in the love of heaven an ocean flows  
Around our realm, a barrier from the foes;  
’Tis ours the sons of sorrow to relieve,  
Cheer the sad heart, nor let affliction grieve.  
By Jove the stranger and the poor are sent,  
And what to these we give, to Jove is lent.”

Sir, the poor of Ireland are this night at the bar of the Imperial Parliament. Many of the more fortunate of their fellow-countrymen already acknowledge their claims, and are most anxious to concede them. The interests of the nation demand a concession of those humble rights which have been already recognized in every civilized country upon earth. An act of mercy and justice can never be contrary to true policy; and this, more especially, is one which conscience dictates, and the public voice demands; and which, sooner or later, must therefore be conceded, even if now refused. May we better consult what is due to our character, to our constituents, and to our country, and not record our verdict against justice and mercy, because they are found in the garb of poverty and distress. If I could bring before the most callous and persevering opponents of this measure who now hear me, those wretched objects who so loudly claim our consideration and relief, if I could bid them,

“Come like shadows, so depart,  
Show their eyes, and grieve their heart,”

then, Sir, I am sure their claims would be instantly acknowledged; and, more than this, if it were possible, by an act

of prescience, to look into futurity, and to summon forth those miserable victims of suffering and poverty, which the further withholding of so just and necessary a law will as surely consign to their melancholy fate, as the want of it has already so often done in times past ; if we could know the sorrow, destitution, and death that will be the inevitable result of our longer neglect, and depict the deeper anguish and long-suffering which the more wretched survivors will have to endure, then, Sir, could any man that bears the human form hesitate as to his vote on this occasion ? And, Sir, if ours cannot, there is an eye that does foresee these sufferings, and a Being that will record them—a Being who will not hold him guiltless, who, seeing his brother have need, and knowing that he will require assistance, shutteth up his bowels of compassion against him ; and all from a deep and doubtful speculation, founded, as I contend, upon the grossest error and delusion, that the measure proposed may possibly somewhat diminish the revenue of the more affluent part of the community. Sir, I hope better things of this Parliament, whose term, on the most favourable principle of anticipation, is almost run ; but, on other grounds, to which it is deeply painful to allude, though it is not inappropriate on this touching occasion to do so, its days we know but too well are few and numbered. May we illustrate its remaining span by an act of mercy, which shall immortalize this session, and render it, in one of its terminating deeds, worthy the gratitude and admiration of the country and of posterity.

Sir, I am fully sensible that I cannot add to the motives for performing this act of justice and compassion those powerful ones, which, on other occasions, have often prevailed. Those, on whose behalf I have addressed this House, have not a representative amongst us ; nor have their united numbers a single vote, or one particle of political weight or influence in the Legislature ; nor do the most liberal of our political projectors, the most radical of our reformers, propose to invest them with any. On the contrary, the present

Parliament has, by a recent Act, deprived many scores of thousands of the Irish peasantry of those rights of suffrage which they had long possessed, which they so deeply cherished, and so eagerly exercised. It has, for a public purpose, despoiled these of their highest civil privilege, if not of their only one. It has, in fact, annihilated their political existence; and if it be content to do this without bestowing some countervailing advantage, without awarding some compensation, whatever be the plea, or whoever the apologists, it has perpetrated an act of the grossest injustice ever recorded in the annals of the civilized world; one which no Parliament durst, on whatever pretence, attempt upon the people of England. Let that deed, therefore, have at least the appearance of a compromise; let it, at all events, be accompanied by some compensation. You profess to have emancipated the possessor of the mansion, but you have politically speaking manacled the inmate of the cottage; free him then, at all events, from the bondage of unrelieved misery and distress. As you confiscated his political, restore his natural rights; and confer those privileges on the humblest class of the Irish community, which are withheld from poverty in no other upon earth. Sir, I trust that the very circumstance of the utter helplessness of those whose cause I have too feebly pleaded, will, therefore, with every generous mind, constitute one of the strongest appeals in their behalf; that it will, in fact, render irresistible those claims which are urged in the sacred name of justice, mercy, and truth.

I most sincerely regret that I have so long wearied the attention of the House; though, in respect both of the late hour at which I have had to address it, and the press of business which is before us, I repeat, I have greatly curtailed my argument. I shall now conclude, therefore, with proposing, as a preliminary measure, and one which I mean on a subsequent occasion to follow up by another of a more general and comprehensive character, in behalf of the industrious classes of society in this country, that a resolution be adopted, which will pledge us to confer Poor Laws upon Ireland. Not, indeed,



precisely those which are in operation in England, but embodying as much as possible their beneficial principle, delivered from those errors and defects, as to their administration, on which the objection to their universal establishment is mainly founded. I will only add, that I have purposely avoided accompanying my resolution with a specific plan, though I conceive there would be little difficulty in suggesting one which would be perfectly practicable, and at the same time applicable to the circumstances of the Country; but the obvious course is, first, to obtain the assent of the House to the general principle. I therefore submit this declaratory proposition :—

*Resolved*,—"That it is the opinion of this House, that the establishment of a system of Poor Laws, on the principle of that of the 43d of Queen Elizabeth, with such improvements and adaptations, as the alterations in the times, and the difference in the circumstances of England and Ireland demand, is expedient, and necessary to the interests of both countries.

A discussion arose on the Motion, in which Lord F. L. GOWER, Mr. WILMOT HORTON, Mr. SPRING RICE, and Mr. SLANEY, spoke in opposition to it, and Mr. TRANT, Mr. GRATTAN, Sir ROBERT WILSON, Mr. DUNCOMBE, and Mr. MONCK, in its favour; after which Mr. Sadler replied as follows.

Sir, having already occupied the House so much at length, I shall reply as briefly as possible to what has fallen from the noble Secretary for Ireland, and from some others in opposition to the motion. And first, as to the objection of the noble Lord, that I did not give him full and timely notice of the precise nature of my motion; I will recall to his Lordship's recollection what seems to have entirely escaped it, the fact of my having gone up to the noble Lord at the very time I gave the notice, and explained to him precisely the course I have now pursued; and again this day week, in presenting a petition from Ireland, I most distinctly stated, that the measure I meant to introduce in favour of the working classes of the

United Kingdom, would commence with the proposition I have this evening submitted to the House. To this fact however my honourable friend the Member for the county of York has borne witness ; and I perceive the noble Lord himself now assents to it. I need not therefore dwell any further upon this ground of objection, which, were it even founded on truth, is of a most frivolous nature. As to the remark that the Poor Law is not deserving of the name of national charity, because it is not, individually considered, voluntary, I beg leave to deny that position. As respects this House, and those whom it represents, whether in originating that law, or continuing it in operation, the legal provision for the poor has the merit of an optional act ; and deserves, as such, all the eulogiums that have been pronounced upon it by a celebrated member of the legal profession, who describes that charity as the means of drawing down the special favour of Heaven upon the nation which has adopted it. And would it not, Sir, be to all intents and purposes a voluntary boon if extended at this moment to the poor of Ireland—would it not be gratefully accepted by them as such ? But as to this optional relief so much eulogized, of what avail had that been on the last calamitous occasion particularly referred to ? The bishop of Limerick had informed a committee of the other House that, at that period when the distress of the Irish awakened the deepest sympathies of the rest of the empire, and pressing applications were made to the proprietors of property in his neighbourhood, of near 100,000 pounds per annum rental, eighty-three pounds only were obtained ! So much for an optional, as a safe substitute for a legal, relief. On the contrary, it is the tardy, boastful, but totally insufficient, assistance of this precarious charity, even in seasons the most calamitous, which is an insult upon the very name of national benevolence ; and which is a mockery of the sufferings which it never adequately assuages. As to what has fallen from the honourable Member for Limerick ; it is true that I was asked to be upon the committee ; but after hearing what might be

called the charge given to that committee by the right honourable Secretary for the Home Department, and the speech of its chairman (Mr. Spring Rice), both, as I understood them, adverse to the only measure which could afford permanent and real relief to the distressed poor of Ireland; when I looked to the construction of that committee, a majority of which were avowed opponents of the very principle of a legal provision, I felt myself justified in refusing to be upon it, or to give evidence before it, certain as I was as to the nature of the conclusion at which they would arrive; which seemed indeed settled beforehand. I did therefore refuse to enlist under the banners of the honourable member for Limerick, conscious as I was, that I should have been a dissentient from his opinion and his report; and should only have served the purpose of making a sham fight upon the occasion, and being dragged afterwards, as in triumph, at the honourable Member's chariot wheels. Indeed I am far from being convinced that the appointment of select committees for adverse purposes ought to induce me to abandon that course which my conscience dictates to me as necessary to be pursued. Many committees, it is true, have already sat upon the subject, and professed to take into consideration the state of Ireland, but hitherto those committees have given rise to nothing except expenses, and authorized individuals to dip their hands deep into the public purse, to exonerate wealth from the discharge of the duties it owes to the poor and to the public. I repeat that I have no confidence whatever in the committee alluded to; and I prognosticate most confidently, that it will decide against the claims which I have thought it my duty to advance. Sir, if accounts do not greatly err (and I hope they may,) the time is approaching, if it has not even now arrived, when the want of a provision for the poor of Ireland will again force itself upon us in the most appalling manner. The rumours of increasing want and scarcity amongst the poorer part of the people of that country, are daily reaching us from different quarters; accompanied by continued and melancholy proofs how utterly inadequate



voluntary charity (as general neglect is too often called) is to the task of relieving the great and increasing distress. I am aware that Ireland contains individuals, who, whether as landlords or philanthropists are all but unrivalled in kindness and benevolence; but what can these, few as they are in number, effect? they will do all they can, but that all will be insufficient to the general relief. Let us make that provision which, while it will compel the heartless and the selfish to relieve that distress which they create and desert, will operate as a boon in favour of those meritorious individuals, whether of high rank or in an humbler station in Ireland, who are constantly struggling to repair the evils which are inflicted upon the country at large. I am aware, Sir, how much ought to be effected in behalf of the poor and labouring classes of our own country, in order to place them in that station of comfort and happiness which they ought to enjoy; and it is my full intention to attempt a general measure in their behalf. I must however first commence with a proposition, the adoption of which would of itself not only essentially serve the poor of our sister country, but greatly benefit those of the kingdom at large. I therefore earnestly implore this House to accede to a resolution, against the adoption of which not the slightest objection worthy of the name of an argument has been advanced.

The resolution was then put and negatived.

FINIS.









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